



Teacher — TO — Ranger — TO — Teacher



Concept

National parks enrich the lives of many in this nation. They provide access to the powerful ideas, values, and meanings ascribed to the remarkable cultural, natural, and recreational heritage of the United States. However, all Americans have not enjoyed these opportunities to connect to heritage resources to the same extent — often based on a variety of social and economic considerations. Some segments have been better served than others.

The challenge for the National Park Service (NPS) is to provide opportunities for all audiences to connect to their national heritage as embodied by national parks. The Teacher to Ranger to Teacher (TRT) program focuses on the education community and engages teachers from under-served schools that are not currently being reached with park programs,

paying particular attention to areas with large, ethnically diverse populations.

Pilot Program

The pilot program involved some of Colorado's national parks and teachers from under-served schools in the Denver Public School District. For the past three summers, several teachers have lived and worked in national parks. They performed a variety of duties depending on their interests and the needs of the parks. Jobs included developing and presenting interpretive programs for the general public, serving at visitor center information desks, developing and reviewing curriculum-based park materials, assisting resource management, and providing activities for under-served youth groups from area schools.

Participating teacher-rangers bring the parks into the Denver Public School System. They draw on their summer's experience as a park ranger to develop lesson plans that will be used during the school year. In April, during National Park Week, teacher-rangers wear their NPS uniforms to school, discuss their summer as a park ranger with other faculty members and students, give students assignments that relate to America's national parks, and discuss the role that units of the National Park System play in preserving our nation's heritage.



Concepts Learned and Incorporated into the Classroom

Teacher-rangers that work in parks with significant natural resources increase their understanding of scientific research and how that research is applied and interpreted. Through this experience they also acquire an appreciation of complex issues that face parks on a daily basis. For example, teacher-rangers learn how:

- adjacent lands that may or may not have compatible resource management philosophies affect park project outcomes;
- to apply National Park Service mission ethics to resource management decisions;
- universities who are assisting with research add new dimensions and insights to park project work;
- training and managing staffs that are administering a park project can be complex and challenging;
- parks procure sufficient funding for projects;
- parks manage the funds and delineate schedules and scopes of what and how various aspects of the park project can be accomplished;
- other departments within the park can influence a project's progress;
- the public becomes involved in the decision-making process; and
- science in parks relates to urban areas and issues.

Teacher-rangers that work in parks with significant cultural and historic resources learn about the complexities of interpreting and researching human

history and current ethnographic matters in parks today. For example, teacher-rangers learn how:

- parks research and interpret American Indian heritage and regularly consult with tribes who have a government-to-government relationship with the park and its resources;
- a variety of resources can be used for research, and how these resources will be used to tell complex stories from a variety of viewpoints;
- a variety of partners contribute to projects being researched in the parks and how this may complicate, but also enrich, the research;
- funding needs to be procured and managed; and
- working with other departments within the park affects a project.

Program Benefits

Benefits for Parks

- ✓ Parks benefit from the teacher's expertise in exchange for the park providing teachers with the cost of housing, uniforms, on-site training, and \$300 per week for eight to ten weeks. Through teacher-rangers, park staffs have direct contact with school systems.
- ✓ TRT helps parks achieve workforce efficiencies that are at the heart of Core Operations Analysis, such as: facilitating recruitment of highly qualified individuals at less than normal cost and meeting park-identified needs by filling short term positions in a variety of program areas.
- ✓ Parks and park employees learn from teacher experience about how to relate to school groups that are composed of diverse populations (including ethnic and urban youth). They learn in ways that are not otherwise available and which could transform the ways those staffs relate to and communicate with diverse populations.
- ✓ Teacher-rangers become life-long ambassadors for the parks in which they have worked, and for the National Park System.

Benefits for Teacher-Rangers

- ✓ Participating teacher-rangers have the opportunity to develop a personal connection with national parks. These teacher-rangers develop a wide array



of teaching examples based on real life experience in parks and create “curricula enhancers” that highlight issues surrounding heritage conservation.

- ✓ Teacher-rangers become life-long friends of the National Park Service and begin teaching an ethic of heritage conservation in the schools where much of America’s future resides.
- ✓ Teacher-rangers obtain a wide range of knowledge and skills by working with, and shadowing, personnel of other divisions such as Resource Management, Maintenance, and non-law-enforcement specialties of Resource Protection.

Program Benefits to the School District

- ✓ Other educators exposed to teacher-rangers in their schools benefit from “curricula enhancers” and other resources. They also gain access to a wide array of resources and teaching tools.
- ✓ Teacher-rangers develop a network with resource specialists, scientists, historians, curators, and the teaching programs and resources of the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior.
- ✓ School districts profit from having teacher-rangers who will be exposed to current resource-based issues and teaching activities.

Program Benefits to Urban School Children

- ✓ This program provides the opportunity for students to connect to the nation’s heritage through the experiences of their teacher-rangers.

A variety of resource issues, based on the teacher’s summer experience, are discussed in class. These might include historic preservation, interpretation, fire, exotic species, endangered species, and air and water issues.

- ✓ Students learn about opportunities for summer and permanent employment with the National Park Service.
- ✓ Students share the enthusiasm of a teacher who has had the opportunity to be a National Park Ranger.

Ongoing Evaluation of the Pilot Program

Evaluation of this program in the formative, operational, and summative stages is critical. Qualitative and quantitative evaluation allows managers to continuously improve the program. All of the data gathered is evaluated and a set of actions are developed for the program.

Evaluation Components

- Participating teacher-rangers are surveyed to determine the effectiveness of the general training that is offered in the spring.
- Annually, filmed interviews of teacher-rangers asking them about their experiences provide an opportunity for year-to-year comparisons to be made. The filmed interviews for FY2004 have just been completed.
- Surveys for student feedback are being developed by teacher-rangers for their park-related classroom activities.
- An end-of-year meeting is held with both parks and teacher-rangers to evaluate what worked and what didn’t. From these meeting notes, a list is compiled along with comments from participants.

Current Cost of the Program

Each teacher-ranger is paid \$2,400 for an eight-week summer season (or \$3,000 for a 10-week season). Each park provides housing and a uniform.

Six digital still cameras and 5 digital movie cameras were purchased for teacher-ranger use in developing activities for the classroom.



Current Status

In FY2003, the National Park Service partnered with Denver Public Schools to place four teacher-rangers in three Colorado national parks. The National Park Service's Intermountain Region funded the FY2003 pilot program with \$12,000.

In FY2004 — as a result of the initial pilot program's success — Intermountain Region agreed to fund the pilot program again for \$21,700. This funded eight teacher-rangers in six Colorado national parks.

In FY2005, a \$25,000 Parks as Classroom (PAC) grant allowed the program to continue in the Colorado parks and pilot it in one Texas park.

Overall, 18 public school teachers have worked 6,000 hours in eight different parks, in two states, at a total cost to the NPS of \$45,000. Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) Agreements are in place with 11 school districts. These districts include: 272 schools, 7,269 teachers, and 123,649 students — of which 54.5% are underprivileged (based on an enrollment of 66,589 students in low-income lunch programs).

Intergovernmental Personnel Act

The Intermountain Region explored a number of ways to hire teachers that would allow them to wear the National Park Service uniform. The IPA seemed to be the best fit for the program. Teachers are detailed from their government agency (public school district) and are allowed to wear the uniform. The agreement also allows for flexibility in defining obligations and duties.

Future Plans

- In FY2006 IMR has agreed to contribute \$30,000 to support the program. It is anticipated that \$25,000 will be provided through a PAC grant. These funds will continue the program in Colorado and expand it to other units in Texas, four parks in Utah, a park in Arizona, and one in New Mexico.
- In FY2007, it is hoped that national parks in Colorado and Texas will recognize the value of the program and locate their own funds to continue it. Funds to continue the program in four Utah parks, the New Mexico park and expand it into other Arizona parks will be requested through Parks as Classrooms.
- For FY2008-2012, funds will be sought through Parks as Classrooms to expand the program into each of the remaining Intermountain Region states (New Mexico, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Utah, and Montana).
- Alternative funding sources will be sought to continue the program beyond 2012.
- Other regions in the National Park Service have expressed interest in the program.

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